

WorkZone: Take stress out of the interview process

By Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)

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Sept. 20—It's normal to feel a few jitters before a big interview. But if you allow stress to overwhelm you, it could make it harder to land the job.

"The calmer and more relaxed you are, the easier it is for you to get across the true you," said Lisa Quast, career coach, business consultant and author in suburban Seattle.

"Any number of things could go wrong that aren't directly related to the interview, but can knock you off your game," she said.

The key to reducing stress is to manage the factors that are under your control, Ms. Quast said.

For example, while you can't control traffic, you can control how much time you give yourself to get to the interview so that you don't show up late.

It helps to prepare well in advance by knowing exactly where you need to go so you don't arrive at the wrong building, or worse, Ms. Quast said. "I've worked at big companies....[where] we actually had people show up in the wrong city," she said.

Verify the address online by checking the company website, and use a smartphone or GPS to find potential routes and estimated drive times.

To be safe, do a trial run to get familiar with the area and find where to park, she said. And have a hard copy with the address and driving directions in case GPS or the smartphone fails.

You also should avoid scheduling more than one job interview or another appointment on the same day.

"You don't want to be stealing quick glances at your watch when you should be listening to what the hiring manager is saying," Ms. Quast said.

To avoid interruptions during the interview, turn off your cell phone. Putting the phone on vibrate isn't a good alternative, she said. "When you're in a quiet room, you can hear it vibrate. It throws the whole pace off the interview."

It's also a good idea to take a restroom break before the interview. Ms. Quast remembers one job candidate who drank so much coffee on the way in that he had to interrupt the interview three times to use the bathroom.

When leaving, ask the interviewer for a business card so you have the correct spelling of the person's name for a follow-up thank-you note or email, she said.

"I can't tell you how many times [job applicants] spelled my name wrong," Ms. Quast said. "If they spell my name wrong...that's an issue."

Ms. Quast also tells clients to prepare for an interview by rehearsing what they will say, and customizing their resume to reflect the requirements listed in the job posting.

"I've interviewed people who aside from gazing at it, never took a second look at the job posting," she said.

It's important to give yourself a pep talk the day of the interview, Ms. Quast said. "Say in your head, 'I'm really excited about the opportunity and I'm going to remain calm.'"

Then picture yourself being offered the position, she said.

"Just like in life, a lot of your success or failure is your attitude."

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